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A Guide for Parents

by Gail Matthews

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Contents

Please Read This First	2
<i>Terms of Use</i>	<i>2</i>
<i>Disclaimer.....</i>	<i>2</i>
Contents.....	3
About the Author.....	5
Introduction	6
What Is Bullying?.....	7
Types of Bullying	8
Who are the Bullies?	12
<i>Where do Adult Bullies come from?</i>	<i>13</i>
Causes of Bullying	14
<i>Violent Games and Movies.....</i>	<i>15</i>
Why Bullies Target Particular Children.....	19
The Effects of Bullying	20
<i>Should Your Child Change Schools?</i>	<i>20</i>
Home Schooling	21
How Do Children Become Victims?	23
The Onlookers	24
How to Help Your Own Children	26
Giving Advice to Children.....	26
<i>Promoting Tolerance.....</i>	<i>27</i>
Signs that your Child may be a Target.....	29
When Your Child has been Bullied.....	31
<i>Dealing with the Bully and their Parents</i>	<i>31</i>
Dealing with Your Child's School.....	33
When Your Child tells You about Bullying	35

Why Children Don't tell Adults about Bullying	36
Helping Your Child to Handle Bullies.	38
Responding to Verbal Bullying.	38
Improve the Child's Social Skills.	40
Are Martial Arts Courses Helpful?	42
You're NOT Alone	43
Internet Resources.....	43
<i>AUSTRALIA:</i>	43
<i>UNITED STATES OF AMERICA</i>.....	45
<i>CANADA</i>.....	45
<i>United Kingdom</i>	45
The Next Step	47

About the Author

Gail Matthews is a concerned parent, not an academic. Gail is been concerned about the problem of bullying in schools which her children attended.

She started to look for further information and was surprised at the extent and serious effects that were linked to bullying from children and also adults who had been bullied or were bullied in their adult lives.

Gail decided to focus her book on bullying of children because that was the area she has had some direct experience with.

She felt there was a need for a simple, non-technical guide with suggestions that could be used by parents like herself wherever they were located.

She believes that this book will help people to assist their children by encouraging them not to bully others and how to best deal with bullies they encounter.

Gail also shows parents some signs that may indicate that children are being silent about bullying they encounter.

She also includes some suggestions about how to support the efforts of their schools and other groups to reduce bullying and deal with its effects.

Gail believes the information which she has gathered will be useful to people, whatever their situation and location. She says that bullying is a world-wide, growing epidemic.

She hopes her book will encourage parents and other interested people to take action about bullying and support its victims so that we can reduce the effects which bullying has on our society and our children's future.

Introduction

This book is intended to show parents who care how to help their children and also how you might be able to make a positive difference in the lives of all the children at the schools which they attend.

I will help you to understand, prepare for and deal with the most common types of bullying.

All parents have a personal stake in reducing and, where possible, preventing bullying in their children's schools and their neighborhood.

The effects of bullying can be very deeply felt and long-lasting.

Some victims never fully recover. There have been some incidents where bullying has resulted in someone taking their own life and even those of other people who were not ever part of the bullying itself.

The rapid growth of the Internet and high-speed communication by mobile phones and other easily available methods has seen a huge increase in bullying where the bully and the victim may be miles apart. But, the effects can be just as bad.

We cannot prevent all bullying and I don't believe that we can stamp it out.

But, for the sake of our children and communities, we need to take an active part in reducing its effects and helping our children.

Gail Matthews 2009

What Is Bullying?



Most people know that bullying involves physical or emotional abuse of someone by another person who is more powerful. That person may be stronger physically or emotionally or have a position which gives them the opportunity to dominate the victim.

A bully is not interested in a physical or mental contest. A bully acts against someone that they believe cannot or will not be able to stop them doing whatever they want to.

Most bullies make repeated attacks and demands on their victims but even a single incident can be harmful to the person that is targeted.

Bullying usually occurs when the bully tries to demonstrate that they or their group are superior in some way to the person they victimize.

They look for a target that is likely to offer little resistance and to react in a way which will make the bully feel superior.

Bullies often browse the school yard near the beginning of the year, looking for potential victims.

Most bullies seek to feed their own ego, some seek power over the victim to get them to do their bidding and a dangerous few actually enjoy hurting their victims.

But, all bullying in whatever form can and usually does inflict damage which can affect the victim and also sometimes those close to them for years.

Bullies may approach their victims in any part of the school, even in areas where adults may be present. But, most attacks occur when adults are not about.

Boys are likely to bully both sexes while girls mostly bully other girls.

Bullies will probably have other potential victims in mind and will switch to another target on their mental list when and if the current victim gets help or starts to assert themselves.

Victims may be targets of the same bully over a long period and are also likely to be targeted by other bullies in later years that also recognize the vulnerability.

Types of Bullying

Bullying occurs in schools, businesses, all kinds of organizations and groups and, unfortunately, also in many homes.

It can take many forms, physical or psychological and each can result in long-term negative effects which may not be obvious until long after the actual bullying episodes.

The most common types of bullying are explained below.

Verbal harassment: This could range from teasing to deeply offensive insults. Be aware that teasing, which many people regard as a minor annoyance, can inflict real hurt on the victims.

The bully will usually target the other child's ethnic background, clothing, speech, appearance, mode of speech or sexuality. The venom in the words will have added sting because of the bully's manner and implied physical threat.

Violence: This is probably the most common type of bullying behavior. It can vary from:

Theft: Bullies might steal their victim's property just to upset them, because they want the item or so they can sell or trade it with other children.



Physical harassment: This may range from annoying pushes and pokes to actual sexual assault. The amount of sexual harassment experienced by older school children has surprised researchers.

Damage to personal property: Bullies will sometimes destroy personal property as a means of intimidating their victim. Sometimes they will target the victim's homework, textbooks and other study material which can cause trouble for the victim with their teachers when they are unwilling to explain why their work is not up to standard and their books are damaged.

Threats: The victim may be threatened with physical attack or other punishment just for the effect on them or it may be used as a means to get the victim to agree to do something which they would not normally do, such as stealing or whatever else the bully wants them to.

When the child does what the bully has demanded, they think they have no option but to do whatever the bully demands of them later on because they fear exposure of the original theft they were forced to do.

Social exclusion: This is where the bully and the group which supports him or her prevent the victim from enjoying their company or taking part in their activities.

This discrimination in social situations by actions or threats which exclude the victim from a group or activity without good cause was described as one of the most hurtful forms of bullying.

There is no physical damage but the emotional impact is intense and continuing.

It is commonly accepted that girls may use this more often than actual physical attacks.



The victim has to watch the interaction of the group every day while knowing that they cannot take part.

It can be equally devastating for a male victim as the desire to be part of the group is very strong for both sexes.

The enforced loneliness is made worse by the knowledge that there is no good reason for them being excluded.

Hazing: Some groups require anyone that wishes to become a member to submit to rituals or activities, sometimes called "hazing", that may be degrading, involve violence and even be dangerous.

The successful participants endure the experience for the chance to be accepted in the group. Then, they take part in the initiation of future prospective members.

This may be regarded by some people as a form of ritualized bullying but the members would say it is "just a tradition".

Long distance intimidation:

Most bullying occurs in face-to-face situations but there has always been some bullying which was done over a distance.

Some bullies used to mail poison-pen letters or secretly insert notes with similar content into their victims' bags or lockers. That way, they could be far away when the target opened and read the message.

But, the development and spread of low-cost technology has encouraged a significant and growing amount of bullying where the target or victim is contacted on their own mobile phone or similar device or over the Internet with a text or verbal message.



The bully can deliver threats or lies and slurs with, usually, much less chance of being called to account.

The letters and scrawled notes could be just torn up and disposed of, but the electronic messages are much harder to ignore and their vile contents can be sent to hundreds of people in a few minutes. Sometimes, a bully will send dozens of messages in a short period of time, aiming to cause maximum distress.

A related form of harassment which is affecting more children, and even adults, each year is the spreading of malicious and usually untrue comments and stories about them through messages to third parties in internet chat rooms.

This can be particularly hard to deal with because the victim may not even know that this is happening until a friend tells them about a message they've seen.

By that time, the messages and rumors could have been read by hundreds of people and spread even more widely.

Who are the Bullies?

It's disappointing but true that almost every child or adult has the potential within them to be a bully. Even if they do not take that role, they could become part of a group that support a bully, either actively or passively, in their attacks.

Some children or adults that may not usually try to intimidate anyone will bully others when they get an opportunity to exert power over another individual and believe they have little chance of ever having to be accountable for their actions.



This is like people that are honest in all their day-to-day activities but might take money from a wallet or purse which they find in the street if they believe that there is little chance that they could be found out.

Sometimes, a child may use bully tactics on another child to gain some advantage without understanding that they are bullying them. They might say, "It was just a bit of fun" because they do not realize or care about the possible negative effect on their victim.

In a later section, I will explain some ways that you might use to help your children learn how to recognize and avoid using these tactics in their interactions with other children.

No form of bullying is ever excusable because there are always negative effects on the person who is targeted.

Children who bully others are more likely to become involved in petty crime in their adolescence and adult lives. They may also bully their friends and partners in later life.

Some children, who themselves have been bullied by other children or in their home environment, may react by starting to use the same tactics themselves on other children or their own younger siblings.

Most bullies prey on other children because:

- It gives them a feeling of power.
- They attract other children into their group who support their actions. They will then also manipulate these other children to do what they want.

Where do Adult Bullies come from?

According to the research I've seen, bullying is supposed to decrease as people move through their teen years and on into adult life.

But, it does not disappear. Bullying occurs through all areas of adult life, personal and business.

Some of it is the work of people that were bullies when they were young, but there is another group who bully other people when they have a chance to; people that bear the scars from being a victim and later on begin to use the tactics which were used on them against others. This includes their partners and often their children as well.



Causes of Bullying

There is no definitive list of factors which cause children to become bullies.

For every bully whose parents or carers were indifferent to their needs or insensitive to their desires, there is also a person whose early home-life was similar but who grew up with a more balanced and caring attitude.

But, most researchers believe that parents are the most powerful influence in the development of bullying behaviors in children.



The first and most important way is by the example they set in how they treat other people and, of course, their own family.

Parents who commit themselves to finding time to listen to and support their children while providing a safe environment with clear and consistent rules will give their children a great start in life.

Parents and other people that influence children may encourage the development of bully characteristics if they:

- Express racist or other anti-social views.
- Give one of their children more favorable treatment than others.
- Ignore aggressive acts by a child against their siblings or other children
- Demonstrate by actions or words that they have a low opinion of a child's abilities.
- Put family time at the bottom of their priority list.
- Make sarcastic comments about their child's ideas and accomplishments.
- Bully their partners, children or friends.

- Fail to set guidelines for their children when they are dealing with family members or other people.

Parents and other role models are a major influence on the child's developing attitudes and actions.

A school which tolerates or ignores any bullying incidents will encourage the development of systematic bullying that will become very hard to remove.

Children who have been bullied at school sometimes become bullies themselves.

Violent Games and Movies

Children have always been entertained with stories that involved violence and other anti-social behavior.

Over many years, a multitude of books, comics, radio shows, movies, television programs and computer games have, in their turn, been criticized as unsuitable or even harmful to children.

Through the years, almost all boys and many girls have copied the actions and attitudes of their favorite fictional characters in games with their friends at school and in their homes.

This usually has not had any negative affect on them but there have always been a few incidents where particularly aggressive children have upset or deliberately harmed others while acting out their own versions of the stories they had seen.

It's probably no surprise that some researchers say that children feel more assertive just after they have seen a violent story. But, they are usually able to release the pent-up energy in games with their friends.

It's possible that children who do not have friends and spend their time mostly using their computer or watching television may be more negatively affected by their bottled-up hostility.

During the time that home computers and the Internet have become more easily accessible to most families, the technology behind computer games and movies has improved and they now are able to affect the viewers' emotions with greater force.

More people have started asking if these forms of entertainment might exert a strong negative influence on very impressionable people, especially children, to copy the aggression which they see being used to achieve successful outcomes with minimum effort or risk.

The claim is often heard that many movies and computer games encourage bullying and other antisocial behavior.

There was actually a game called "Bully" released in 2006 by an American videogame company called Rockstar Games. In the original game, the teenage "hero" used bullying tactics against other pupils and teachers. He pushed other characters' heads into toilets, assaulted them in various ways and also took compromising photos of some of them.

After pressure from teachers and parents, some stores did decide not to sell the game. But, that did not prevent "bully" winning awards. The publicity probably helped the game to achieve a higher level of sales than it might have otherwise.

Sales were so good that an updated version was released in 2008.

The later version was released in the United Kingdom with a rating that allowed it to be sold to children 15 years and over.

The major retailers said that they would abide by the rating but none refused to sell the new version.

Critics said that this would mean that much younger children would also be able to get hold of the game fairly easily. Even if their own parents refused to let them get their own copy, many would get access when they visited the homes of their friends who had the game.

The updated version is also available for use on the newer game consoles, such as the Xbox and Wii.

It was described by a spokesman for the Rockstar Games software company as "one of the funniest games you will play."

A review on a web site described it as a "light-hearted depiction of high school".

Tactics used by the main character in the new version include hand to hand fighting, exploding firecrackers on the face of another character as well as using itching powder and stink bombs.

While the market-place rewards producers of games like this with substantial profits, some companies will continue to produce and market them.

Criticism that does not result in restrictions is seen by the companies as valuable free publicity.

There is, as far as I know, no proof that this sort of entertainment encourages the average player to use the same tactics in their own schools and other places.

But, the effect of this material on less well adjusted players is claimed by some researchers and parents to be an unacceptable risk.

They say that the problem is greater because:

- The violent characters are the most successful and suffer no penalty for their activities.
- The blood, pain and other physical effects on the victims is not shown or is minimized to comply with current legislation. That can give the viewers the impression that the effects from even the most violent incidents are only minor. I remember seeing many Westerns when I was young where almost everybody who was killed by bullet or arrow usually died smiling without the slightest hint of discomfort!
- The amount of this kind of entertainment which many children see is much greater than it was even a few years ago. Television is sometimes referred to as the "electronic babysitter". The new computer games and other similar devices are fulfilling the same function in many homes because it's becoming more common for both parents to have to work to support their family.
- There is less parental involvement or supervision of what children are exposed to. Many children have their own televisions,

computers and game consoles along with enough money to buy whatever games or videos they want to.

Some restrictions are needed to protect younger, very impressionable children from excessive violence and other antisocial behavior as it is sometimes depicted (some say glorified).

But, current research has not found any proof of a link between the games and movies and antisocial behavior, except in isolated cases which usually involve players that had significant emotional problems before they started playing the games and watching the videos.

It will continue to be the responsibility of parents to promote values which could reduce the influence of these diversions on their children.

The exposure of children to repeated and overwhelming violence in news programs and documentaries is also believed by some researchers to encourage the development of bullying attitudes in some aggressive children.

There is so much concentration on negative stories by some news media that a friend describes their programs as "3D news". She says that they are full of death, disaster and destruction.

There is little chance that this imbalance, which offers little that is inspirational or reassuring, will change because these sorts of stories give the media high ratings and their advertiser's great sales figures.

Why Bullies Target Particular Children



The main reason that bullies target particular children is because they see characteristics which lead them to believe that those children will respond in a submissive or frightened way that will feed the bully's ego and achieve their other aims if they have them.

The bully will say that their attack is based on some real or imagined difference between themselves and the potential victim. That can be the bully's genuine though biased view but, at its core, it is really just an excuse for the bully to justify his action against the Victim.

The bully is really attracted to certain children because of their attitude. Victims act in particular ways which draw bullies to them.

The next question is, "Why do bullies continue to attack some victims many times?" It is because they get the reaction which feeds their ego?

The Effects of Bullying

It is important to realize that the type or extent of the bullying is not as important as the effect on the victim.

A child can suffer significant damage over time from what may seem to be a very minor and isolated incident.

It is the child's perception of the event and how we can all help them to overcome any effects which must be the focus.

When a child is bullied, their self-image is likely to be damaged. Their confidence in themselves and belief in the values which you have helped them to build will be tested.



The old saying, "Sticks and stones will break my bones but names will never hurt me", is false. Words can wound and have negative effects for the victim for a long time, just like a physical attack. A major effect felt by many victims and even some onlookers is stress. This can be so great that it may affect their underlying health. Stress can increase the severity of asthma and some skin conditions.

The inability to escape the torment or resist the attack can lead to depression which is increased by the knowledge that it is very likely that there will be further unpleasant episodes in the future.

Should Your Child Change Schools?

Sometimes, the effects of bullying can have such severe impact that the parents may decide to move their child to another school or even their whole family to a different area.

This will have financial and social costs, disrupt the learning routines of all their children and disrupt the family routine for months.

There is also the possibility that the new school will be no safe harbor if the child does not get some help to address the causes and effects of the incident.

If the child carries the same anxieties and attitudes into their new school, they are likely to be targeted by a bully in the new location.

All schools have bullies and they can sense when a susceptible person comes within their reach.

Try to find out whether there are any children at the new school who are already known and liked by your child. That could make the decision easier and give the change a much better chance of success. But, it will still take time, measured in months, before you will be able to fairly judge if it has been worthwhile for the child and the whole family.

If the effect on the victim has been severe enough to warrant a change to another school, they may need professional help to assist them deal with those effects. The change will bring new challenges for everyone but especially the child that was targeted.

Their self-confidence will need reassurance and their general health will have to be watched. The adjustment to a new school will add more pressures, whether or not the family has also moved to a new area.

I am not qualified to advise you on what's best – consult your health and education experts who know your details. All I want to do for you is to point out that a change of schools should not be taken without considerable investigation and discussion about all factors. Make sure that you include all your children in those discussions.

Home Schooling



Home schooling is another option which is used by some parents who have children that were seriously affected by bullying.

If you have the financial and time resources to provide quality education experience for your child (and perhaps any others in the family as well) it may be worth considering.

Bullies are not the only distraction which you avoid by home schooling your child. You can give your child concentrated attention and an average day's lessons will probably be done in a shorter time than at a regular school where the teacher has to attend to the needs of a large number of children.

You can give more time to those areas which are of particular interest to your child or where they need more help. You will not face the dilemma of most teachers about how to fairly divide their time and attention to all the students in a class.

Most studies that have been done indicate that home-schooled students get better than average marks in tests with children from all kinds of other school systems.

Your child will probably have more contact with adults but you will have to ensure that they get enough interaction with children around their own age so that their social development is not further affected. You will have more control over the children that they associate with – no bullies allowed!

Here are organizations in every country which can provide information about the options and opportunities for home schooling. State and Federal authorities also have information and copies of the relevant rules etc.

Although home schooling has many supporters and there are many success stories, the demands on the parents and the students are high.

If you decide to try homeschooling after investigating the costs and legal requirements, I suggest that you give yourself an option to transfer your child to a regular school again at some time if you decide that it will be in their best interests or those of the entire family.

How Do Children Become Victims?

Most bullies will target someone that they regard as different to them and, therefore, not as good as they are.

This difference may be because of their appearance, habits, cultural background, manner of speaking, physical characteristics or because of some perceived physical or mental impairment.

Children that attend other schools or excel at their studies are also likely to be targeted because they make the bully more aware of his or her own shortcomings in those areas. Their prime targets are children that appear weaker or less socially connected than they are.



Sometimes, a child will accept some bullying in return for being allowed to be part of the group which the bully controls. Many children think they caused the bullying. This can be hard to discuss because they are not likely to express the thought in words. The best way to address this doubt might be to look for opportunities to give them sincere praise for something they do.

The Onlookers

There are victims and there are bullies. Then, there are the families of both these groups and also the people who have some formal responsibility for supervising the children and ensuring their safety.

There is also another group of people that can have a great influence on the extent of bullying in a school or community. They are the onlookers who witness the bullying. The group includes children and also adults.

You probably would expect that most people, especially adults, would intervene to stop bullying which they witnessed, but this is not what happens in many incidents today. Bullying is not confined to the shadows; many bullies have no hesitation about attacking their victim wherever they are as long as there are no teachers or parents actually present. Maybe it adds to the buzz which they get from bullying.

Generally, children react like many adults have done when they have witnessed a disturbing or violent incident in the street. A significant number try to ignore it and avoid being noticed. Some of these children are frightened that they may become a victim themselves while others just don't want to get involved. Some want to help the victim but don't know how to intervene effectively. Some, though usually very few, will act to help the victim.

This group includes children that have well-balanced interpersonal skills or the support of friends that provide them with positive values and support to act on them.

Some will try to argue with the bully. That is almost never effective unless they also show they are prepared to actively help the victim by defending them or by helping them to get away from their attacker.

Some will report the attack to a teacher or other person in authority. That percentage is usually very low but even one with the courage to do so can help to reduce the number of future incidents and also provide support for the victim.

A small percentage may actually join in the harassment by the bully where they also have negative views about the victim or some aspect of their appearance, sexuality or ethnic background.

Each person probably has a way that they can rationalize their action or lack of it. They might say:

- They brought it on themselves.
- I could not handle the attacker by myself.
- It was not my fight.
- I'm wearing new clothes.

A major influence which discourages children from assisting the victim or becoming involved in any way (like reporting the incident) is the advice which many parents give.

They, understandably, don't want their children to get into a situation where they might be hurt or which might lead to retaliation by the bully or their group at a later time. So, they tell the child not to get involved and don't tell on anyone.

That may keep them physically safe but does nothing to reduce the bullying problem. And, it does not protect them from the stress of watching something which they instinctively know is wrong but which they cannot do anything about.

Some children who witness this sort of incident at school or in their homes can lose their sensitivity to such violence and may start to believe it is a normal way to resolve their difficulties and another bully or, at least, a supporter of bullies is created.

How to Help Your Own Children

The most important thing which you can do to assist your children is to be a role model and actively demonstrate the values which you want them to follow in dealing with everyone that they come in contact with.

Giving Advice to Children

Children, like many adults, need direction from time to time. But, it can be quite difficult for us to give it in a way that they understand and are able to take action about.

Children are always testing themselves and their boundaries as they prepare themselves for the future in a rapidly changing World.



It may not be effective if we simply tell our children, "Do this" and "Do that" where our advice is always in the form of blunt instructions (the way that many of our parents probably passed on their knowledge and experience to us).

Most children who are attending school are more influenced by the opinions and comments of their peers and classmates than they are by advice from their parents.

Anthony Robbins, the famous motivator, pointed out that learning something new is most effective when the new information can be related to something we already know.

To help your child understand and deal with bullying and other concerns, you need to relate your message to something which the child already understands. Think about passing on your advice when you can

link it with something which one of their friends or someone else they admire did instead of just telling them this is how you should behave in this sort of situation.

Another way which can encourage children to take note of what we say is to show a genuine interest in what they say. Don't be too quick to judge their comments or laugh at their ideas. If your child starts a new hobby or starts trying to break a bad habit, give them support and encouragement, especially when things aren't working right for them.

Encourage them to persist but try to find a more recent role model than that knight and the spider. When you want to discuss a difficult subject like bullying with your child, you both might find it less stressful if you talk while you are doing some activity which you both enjoy, such as making cookies. This can make the talk seem less formal and reduce their stress level.

If you are looking for a reason to talk to them about bullying, maybe you could find a report on the news or a story in a television program which you both watch which has an element of bullying or where one character treats another in a mean way.

You could also ask them what they think of the different styles of jokes in different shows. Some comedians use put-downs to get a quick laugh while others get their laughs without making the other person look silly. Perhaps you could ask them how they would prefer to be treated and how they would feel if someone used a unkind joke against them. A friend of mine said it well recently, "Don't try to build yourself up by putting someone else down."

Don't try to pretend that you have all the answers. If they ask you about something and you don't have the information, say so.

Promoting Tolerance

For all the obvious and subtle differences between us, we are all human beings. We need to accept the differences between our cultures, beliefs and goals. Most importantly, we should always encourage our children to accept and welcome people that are different from them.



This won't happen if we just suggest that they let children with different backgrounds and appearance join their games. It's much better to demonstrate

by our own actions the good manners and goodwill which we want them to adopt.

When you are with your child and they make some remark about someone who has a different appearance, style of clothing or whatever, you could point out to your child that it would be a very dull World if we were all exactly the same.

Signs that your Child may be a Target

As I have shown in the previous section, there are many reasons why some children will tell their parents about being bullied while others may not.

Even parents that have developed a close bond with their children may not find out from the child when they have been the target of a bully.

Sometimes, even the professionals can have trouble recognizing that a child is being victimized.



You can use this list to help you detect whether there is a strong possibility that your child has been bullied if you cannot get the confirmation from the child or other reliable source. I have compiled this list from what other parents have told me and the advice of experienced professionals. But, it is important to keep in mind that none of the points which I

include here are definite indicators that your child is being bullied. There may be a totally different reason why your child is showing the particular behavior or symptom.

You must use your own judgment and knowledge of your child and never just jump to conclusions.

A child that has been bullied may:

- Lose interest in visiting friends or having some friends visit them.
- Have bruises, cuts or other marks which they don't mention and are reluctant to explain.
- Claim to have lost their lunch or pocket money.
- Say they damaged or lost books or other materials from their school bag or even the bag itself.

- Lose their previous enthusiasm for school and after school activities, including sport.
- Claim to be sick, with vague symptoms or even real ones, more frequently than before.
- Develop rashes, cold sores or other minor infections which may be stress related.
- Refuse to go on school excursions or attend school functions.
- Start getting lower grades for no apparent reason.
- Be unable to sleep without nightmares, excessive sweating or other signs of distress.
- Lose their appetite or start to over indulge in snack foods.
- Miss classes or stay away from school for days at a time.
- Starting complaining they're hungry as soon as they get home from school (the bully may have stolen or thrown away the lunch you prepared).
- Spending more time alone at the computer or watching television.
- Sudden change in temperament with angry outbursts and more arguments with siblings or parents.
- Make repeated demands for more fashionable clothes and other accessories which are popular with the children at their school.

If you see any of the indicators that I have listed above, your child will offer an explanation for it. You may believe that they are hiding the truth from you, but that could just be out of genuine concern, because they don't want to worry you or they think you might be disappointed in them if they tell you that they have been bullied.

It is best to develop a habit of chatting with your children and displaying a genuine interest in their experiences at school over time rather than only showing an interest when they are showing signs like those listed above. But, they will expect you to ask and you should be as tactful as you can how you discuss this or other personal subjects with them.

When Your Child has been Bullied

If you hear from a reliable third party about your child being bullied or if you are convinced that it is happening because of the changes in behavior and temperament that you have seen, approach the matter calmly and avoid dramatic questions or accusations.

Dealing with the Bully and their Parents

Most parents will naturally be upset when they know that their child has been bullied. Sit down with your child and get their version of the incident or incidents. It's a good idea to write everything down and keep a record of all matters that relate to the bullying and your follow-up until the matter is resolved.

If you find out the name of the child that your child tells you are the bully, you may want to confront the child or group that targeted their child directly and as soon as possible.

This is an understandable reaction but it is unlikely to produce a positive result. In that sort of situation, you should always make sure that you cannot be accused of applying any sort of pressure on any child.

You must treat them as you would expect your own child to be treated if the roles were reversed. Only meet the child if the meeting has been set and you know that a neutral adult, such as a teacher, is also present. If you know or find out the names and address of the bully's parents, you may try to meet them and discuss the issue.

Let me warn you that this can often lead to confrontation between yourself and the other parents. This can have a serious and long-lasting effect on any bond or relationship which your family has enjoyed with them in the past. Keep that possibility in mind.

But, of course, your main focus will be to find out what actually occurred and to stop your child being bullied as quickly as possible to limit the possibility of any long-term harm.

The other child's parents are likely to have a totally different view of the situation. Their child may have told them that the children were just playing a game or even that your child was the aggressor!

To give yourself the best chance to resolve the situation, approach them in a calm and co-operative manner. Ask for their help in solving your mutual problem rather than demanding that their child be punished.

Make sure that you write down your recollection of everything that was said at the meeting with the parents, if you have one, before you forget anything. I believe that it's a better choice for you to contact the school and let them follow up with the other family. I'll cover that and some other suggestions in the next chapter.

Dealing with Your Child's School

All schools in each country face growing demands and shrinking resources. The basic demands are that they provide a safe and supportive environment where the students can increase their knowledge and learn to make the best of their abilities.

Schools also provide a great opportunity for children to develop their social skills and forge friendships which may last the rest of their lives. Schools also often encourage, unintentionally, bullying of the weak by the strong. This mostly happens between students but there are also many incidents where teachers or other staff bully each other or some of the students.

There must be a good level of supervision in a school or bullying could flourish. The best schools will support their students and their teachers and other staff. They will treat all with equal respect and provide good systems and role models. Some schools boast that they don't have any bullying but that always makes me wonder.

When your child has been bullied and you want it stopped, I believe that the best course would be to report the matter to your child's school principal and also contact their home room teacher. They are likely to have some experience of similar situations and know more about the activities and alliances of all the children involved than you do.

The school will also have access to professional help if it should be required. So, give them all the details you have and ask them to follow it up. If you don't get any satisfactory response, you should contact other parents that are not involved in the incident and the parent's group, if the school has one, to find out if there is a history of bullying and get their suggestions about obtaining a positive result.

After about a week, contact the school and arrange to meet the home room teacher, a senior teacher (preferably the principal) and their human resources person if the school has one. Let your child attend the meeting if they want to. Don't push them to do so.

But, either way, make sure that you take your written record of the incident and the follow-up to the meeting with the teachers.

Do as I suggested earlier for your discussion with the other child's parents. Calmly state the facts as you know them and ask for their help to resolve the matter. Do not blame anyone and don't make threats. You want their cooperation because they have more knowledge than you about the legal and education systems and are more likely to help you if you maintain a professional attitude.

Make notes about everything that is said and who said it. Ask any questions that come to mind, such as the level of supervision during classes and, breaks as well as before and after school. Try to get information about other bullying incidents and how they were resolved.

After the meeting, carefully prepare a letter with all the facts, your recollection of the discussion and what you believe has been agreed as the next step.

If you do not see any progress with the school after a week or so, contact them by phone and ask for an update in writing. Contact other parents to check whether there are any other recent bullying episodes at the school.

If these are also unresolved, you may be able to get the other parents to join you in an approach to the School Board or the relevant public official if it is a public school. Ensure that you keep a record of any further incidents involving your child while you try to get action from the school. It may be time-consuming and frustrating but this method should get you results.

It is a good demonstration to your child of following proper process and shows that they have your support and you will take whatever action you need to help them.

When Your Child tells You about Bullying



Many children will not feel confident enough to tell an adult, either a parent or teacher or other authority figure, that they have been bullied. They may have learned from other children as well as their parents that it is wrong to tell tales.

We need to assure them that telling a responsible adult about a potentially harmful situation which affects them or other children is always the right thing to do.

Research suggests that most children will tell someone about bullying which they have been subjected to.

This will usually be another child, less often a parent (most often their mother) and even less often a teacher or other person in a position of authority.

Boys are usually less likely to tell someone. Perhaps because they are conditioned by society and the books and movies they see to believe that they should try to handle those sorts of problems themselves.

If your child does tell you that they have been bullied, it is a sign that your relationship with the child is a strong one. Your first reaction is very important.

Even an incident which you might feel is minor can be distressful for a young child. It will influence how the child deals with future incidents and also how confident they will feel about seeking support from you or other adults in the future.

Show that you care about how they feel and that you will help them through the situation. Some people will tell their children to ignore the

incident if it seems to be minor or if they think it may not be repeated. This can suggest to the child that their concerns and the physical or emotional hurt they suffered is not as important to you as they feel it is. It could make them keep quiet about any further incidents.

This could have a lasting impact as bottling up their feelings about the bullying along with your lack of effective response might increase their emotional stress.

That could lead to the development of physical or emotional ailments later on or it may lead them to bully other children, even their younger siblings.

Don't just tell the child what they should do without showing by word and action that you understand on an emotional level what they are going through and that they can depend on your support as well as your advice.

Why Children Don't tell Adults about Bullying

Several factors can cause a child to not report bullying which they are subjected to.

- The aggressor will usually threaten them to not tell anyone.
- The child may not feel that adults, whether their family or teachers or other authority figures, will take them seriously or be able to provide effective support.
- A child may not have any close friends among the other children.
- The child may fear the reaction of other children when they learn about them reporting the bullying.
- The victim may know of other students who have reported the attacks on them and either not been believed or failed to gain any help to resolve the problem.
- Sometimes, the victim has reported that things got worse after they reported the first incident!

Research suggests that nobody; teachers or any other group, were more than 50% successful in stopping the bullying.

If those figures reflect the current situation, we need to improve the way that reports are followed up so that better outcomes become the norm rather than the exception.

Helping Your Child to Handle Bullies.

You can help your child to be prepared for bullies as it is inevitable



they will encounter one or more in each of the schools which they attend. I feel the most important thing you need to tell your child is that you will be ready to support them with any problems that they encounter at school or elsewhere.

You can also help them to develop their social skills, self-confidence and a network of friends – three important factors which help to reduce the chance that they will be bullied and that they will be much better able to cope with it if anyone tries to bully them.

Responding to Verbal Bullying.

Verbal bullying is one of the most common types which children and adults will encounter. Most will react by showing signs of distress or trying to turn the attack on their tormentor with an equally insulting verbal response or physical attack.

These responses are what the bully expects and each of them will inevitably encourage more abuse. An assertive but polite response can reduce the likelihood of further bullying for a time, but this is not something which comes easily to children.

The response needs to be something which is non-confrontational and which your child is comfortable about using.

He or she might say, "You may be right, thank you" and then keep walking on without giving any indication that the comment had any importance or impact.

I have read advice that children should make a joke about the bully's taunt. I feel that could provoke a swift physical response from the bully who would not like to have their intended victim *make fun of them*.

Most bullies are not real bright and may not even understand the joke. What they don't understand, they don't like and many tend to hit what they don't like.

That's why I think the firm but neutral remark like the one I wrote above is the best course.

Improve the Child's Social Skills.

A child that has a poor self-image or lacks social skills will find it hard to mix with the other children at their school. This will leave them isolated and their tendency not to mix with the other students will attract negative comments which will probably drive their opinion of themselves further down.

Their attitude and situation will probably attract the attention of bullies. These children also display some basic characteristics which reinforce their "difference" from most of the children in the school:

Showing anger, fear and other negative emotions on your face will attract a bully's attention.

Let the child practice keeping their face smooth, "like a poker player with a winning hand".

If their hands shake, they might want to keep them in their jacket pockets. Boys might prefer to get a coin and learn to roll it from finger to finger around their hands. Or, they could exercise their hands by squeezing a small rubber ball which can help to increase the strength in their wrists.

If the child is shy, suggest that they try to talk to two children they don't know at school each week or even each day. Ask them what they might say because they need to ask questions which show a genuine interest in the person they have just met.

Showing a genuine interest in other people is the first building block in repairing their way of interaction with the children and other people they meet.

Another indicator which attracts bullies to potential victims is their poor posture. They often stand like they have been found guilty of something.

The quickest way to help them improve their posture is to suggest that they try to stand like one of their favorite media personalities or even a teacher or other adult they know and admire.

If they still slump, tell them you have tied a thread to the center of the top of their head and they are about to be pulled upward until they are standing tall.

That works – it's a simple and practical technique which they can use any time and anywhere to improve their posture in seconds.

Another thing which can be quickly improved is how they breathe. Many children and adults get along on quick short breaths which they only draw into the top of their lungs. That's inefficient and unhealthy. Tell them to stand straight and put their finger tips on their stomach. Now, they should try to draw a breath in through their nose and deep into the chest.

Tell them to wait a few seconds and then breathe out slowly. It might take a few tries to get it right but this also will help them feel and look more comfortable and confident.

A smile is really the shortest way between two people. But some people only like to smile once every leap year and then they forget!

Tell them, "If you smile at three people today, at least one of them will smile back at you."

"Then you can pass on that smile to someone else tomorrow."

Record them on video if you have a camera – you could even use a little web cam attached to your computer.

Let them practice which exercises they want to do and keep the recording.

Then, get them to record themselves a few weeks later or whenever they want to do so.

The improvement they will see will help to boost their confidence.

Are Martial Arts Courses Helpful?

Some parents will react to their child, especially a son, being bullied by trying to teach them how to defend themselves or fight the bully.

This can have some benefits but it is not likely to be much use to the child because:

- It will take some time for them to learn enough to be able to defend themselves.
- It suggests to them, when they are very impressionable, that violence should be countered with equal or greater force.
- When they fight back, it is likely that the bully or their mates will escalate their aggression and the risk of injury to your child or others will increase.

Many parents think about enrolling their children in martial arts or other strength building, sports-related courses.

I believe that a properly run course, which is appropriate for the age of the child, can have benefits over time.

The major benefits for most children will be:

- An increase in their self-esteem which may reduce the likelihood that they will be targets of further bullying.
- Interacting with the other children who are also taking the course.
- Better fitness.
- Increased self-discipline from having to fit the exercises and training sessions into their daily routine.

A good course will help your child, but any fitness or sport-related activity could provide most of the same benefits.

Involvement in a team sport could be a better choice because it would have them mixing with other children about their age.

You're NOT Alone

We must try to assure children, both ours and those we have dealing with, that they do not have to deal with bullying or the effects which come from this or other problems which they face in their formative years alone.

The lonely child, the child with emotional problems or a difficult home life is likely to be a prime target of bullies and they may be the source of the next generation of bullies.

There are many resources in our communities and internationally which are focused on countering bullying and its effects.

This listing is for different countries. The listings include government and private organizations in no particular order:

Internet Resources

Important Note:

All good web sites update their pages regularly. Sometimes this means that they change the location of some material.

Use the Search function (usually a small box with a picture of a magnifying glass beside it) if any of the pages I list are no longer available.

If that does not find what you want, email the webmaster or use a reputable Search Engine and copy the address from the listing.

Keep your anti-virus and anti-spyware programs up to date. Make sure that you type in the correct web site address (many fake sites exist which have similar spelling to sites like the BBC, Banks etc and they are dangerous.

AUSTRALIA:

Bullyingnoway <http://www.bullyingnoway.com.au/>

Produced, maintained and supported by all levels of Australian governments to provide information



for all types of schools (private, public) around Australia.

Of course, there's probably some information which can be adapted to other countries.

Child Safety Australia

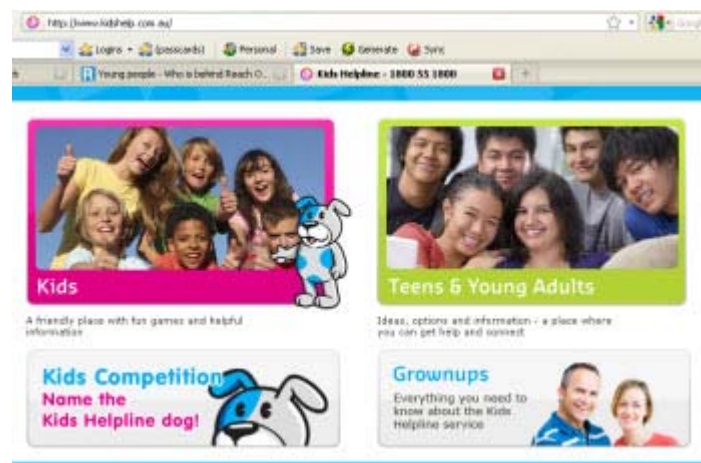
<http://www.childsafetyaustralia.com.au/intro.htm>

This site does have what seems good information but there is no information about who runs the site.

Make your own judgment.

KidsHelpLine

<http://www.kidshelp.com.au/>



This is the site for the group that run the Children's free help phone Line.

It is a project of Boystown which has a long history of helping children.

Lawstuff

<http://www.lawstuff.org.au/>

A lot of people, including almost all bullies, don't realize there are legal implications and penalties for people that bully anyone.

Victims have rights!



This site is run by the National Children's and Youth Law Centre has valuable information about this area

UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

Yahoo Groups which discuss Bullying

<http://groups.yahoo.com/phrase/how-to-prevent-school-violence>

This is a list of groups which hold discussions in Yahoo's Groups about bullying and related topics.

Check out any group carefully because people may not use their correct names – there are risks to your privacy etc if you aren't careful.



Don't share highly personal information without making checks off the Internet.

Despite my caution, I know that discussions with people through good groups can lead to sharing of ideas to benefit everyone.

CANADA

Bullying.org

<http://www.bullying.org/>

A site created by a father and teacher in cooperation with a focus group of school children in response to school shootings in the U.S.A. and Canada in 2000.

[Very useful site wherever you are located.](#)

United Kingdom

BBC Resource about Bullying

A great resource with material for children on other pages.



Media (television, newspapers etc change their page locations more frequently than most sites.

http://www.bbc.co.uk/schools/parents/life/health_happiness/problems/bullying.shtml

Bullying UK

<http://www.bullying.co.uk/>

Organization with focus on helping children and parents deal with bullying and its effects.

The Next Step

You've reached the end of my book. I hope you've found the journey interesting and re-assuring.

The next step is to apply the suggestions which I've included here to help your children and your community reduce the incidences and effects of bullying.

I wish you Good Luck and Great Success!

Gail Matthews 2009

[Another eBookWholesaler Publication](#)